

ATTITUDES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES TOWARDS CONSERVATION OF THE MANGROVE ECOSYSTEM IN KUCHING, SARAWAK

AHMAD SHUIB¹, LEE SOOK YEE² and SALBIAH EDMAN²

¹Institute of Agricultural and Food Policy Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Putra Infoport, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

²Department of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Corresponding author: mad.shuib@gmail.com

Abstract: The deltaic mangrove forest areas in the District of Kuching are being exploited at an alarming rate even though conservation programs are extended to the local communities. This study is carried out to determine the factors that influence the attitudes of the local communities towards conservation of the mangrove forest resources. 326 questionnaires have been collected from 15 villages in the mukim of Sematan, Lundu, Santubong and Matang in the District of Kuching. Data have been collected using face to face interviews of the households in the selected villages. Using exploratory factor analysis nine factors are identified that reflect the attitudes of villagers which include protection of fauna, payment for conservation, ecotourism, management and conservation programs, economic and commercial values, damage and losses, government responsibility, knowledge and physical impacts. Factors like socio-demographics, economic activities, location specific of the villages and managerial programs are tested to determine the influence on the attitudes. The results reveal that age, gender, occupation (student), and mangrove replanting have significant causal relationship with attitudes towards conservation. The study shows that the majority of the members of the communities who are living near the mangrove forest in the District of Kuching show positive attitudes toward conservation of mangrove forest resources. Awareness campaign and education for the younger generations should be extended to the local communities to enhance their participation in the conservation of the mangrove forest resources.

Key words: non timber products, ecotourism, socio-demographics, awareness campaign, participation, protection of fauna

INTRODUCTION

The mangrove forests in the state of Sarawak cover the shorelines and the estuaries of major rivers of the state. The mangrove delta in the District of Kuching covers an area of 52,318ha, mostly lowland areas near the sea-level and hill areas of Pulau Salak. In general, the deltaic mangrove forest in the district is of good quality and little disturbed. Like in all mangrove habitat, the forest provide a wide array of raw resources and an abundance of fish that are spawned and grow amongst the protection of the root systems and timber that is extracted for production of charcoal construction piles, poles and firewood. The mangrove forest has become a major source of income generation and subsistence for the local communities. Besides, mangrove forest protects land from soil erosion and the effects of storms and king tides forming important components of the water cycle, absorbing excess water flow